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## Financial Assistance, Marketing Assistance and Export Commitment to Improve Export Performance

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**Abstract:**

*The purpose of this paper is to investigate the contingent relationship between government marketing assistance for export and the performance of early internationalizing firms in a developing country's low-tech industry.*

*The authors employ hierarchical multiple regression based on the data obtained from Indonesia, a developing country and a leading exporter of apparel products worldwide. The authors used a sample of 100 early internationalizing apparel firms to test the hypotheses.*

*Research describes the relationship between export assistance (financial and marketing assistance) and performance as direct. Recently, some researchers have suggested moderators between them. The authors argue that the relationship between the two is contingent on the level of competitive advantage. The authors find that financial assistance and marketing assistance are directly related to export performance. The relationship between financial assistance and export commitment to export performance are significantly. The effect of marketing assistance is positively, but only marginally, moderated by competitive advantage.*

*Contrary to researchers overarching focus on a direct relationship, the authors investigate the moderation on the relationship between financial assistance and marketing assistance, and early internationalizing firm's performance in a developing country's low-tech industry setting. The authors use competitive advantage as the moderator; it is one of the most important internal determinants of export performance and extremely relevant in early internationalizing firms. The differential impact of financial and marketing assistance provides additional insights.*

**Keywords:** Financial assistance, Marketing assistance, competitive advantage, export commitment, export performance, Internationalization.

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## **1. Introduction**

Research on export performance is relevant for three major groups: managers, researchers, and public policy makers (Katsikeas, 2000; Sousa, 2004). For managers, a higher level of export performance is desired because it boosts corporate revenue and ensures company survival in the long term (Samiee, 1990; Terpstra, 2000). To researchers, exporting is important because it provides a good context for theory building in international marketing (Zou, 1998). Finally, to public policy makers exporting is considered a tool for strengthening foreign exchange earnings, increasing national employment, improving productivity, and thus enhancing national wealth and prosperity (Czinkota, 1994). Considering its manifold contribution to national economies, governments in most countries try to promote exporting through government-sponsored programs.

Two research streams are observed in the export assistance literature (Gillespie, 2004): one stream investigates the impact of such assistance on country level export performance, and the other focusses on firm-level performance. Although country level studies have established a positive relationship between export promotion programs' usage and national export growth (Coughlin, 1987; Kaiser, 2003; Lederman, 2010; Breckova 2016), they are not without methodological flaws (Gençtürk, 2001). Furthermore, limitations associated with national level measures have also encouraged export assistance researchers to shift their research attention to firm-level performance outcomes (Gillespie, 2004; Mares and Dlaskova 2016). Two types of export assistance should also be considered: financial and marketing (Diamantopoulos, 1993; Shamsuddoha, 2009). Financial export assistance is straightforward and includes direct and indirect financial incentives such as lower taxes, export loans at lower-than-market rates, duty-free import/export provisions, and cash incentives. Marketing assistance bears more significance because of its direct role in a firm's relation with its markets (Seringhaus, 1986). Although export marketing assistance has been classified into two categories: finance assistance and marketing assistance (Diamantopoulos, 1993; Gençtürk, 2001), no research has explored their differential impact on firms export performance.

Although researchers have a consensus that export assistance positively affects export performance, some empirical studies have shown insignificant results. This may be because the pertinent literature mainly assumes only a direct and no contingent relationship between the use of such assistance and firms export performance (Donthu, 1993; Marandu, 1996; Singer, 1994; Spence, 2003). Recently, some scholars have emphasized that the relationship between export assistance and export performance is contingent on some other variables such as export involvement and competitive advantage (Gençtürk, 2001; Lages, 2005; Barney, 2012; Shamsuddoha, 2006; Bogdanova *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, the export performance literature acknowledges export commitment is the most influential management-level determinant of export performance (Chetty, 1993; Sousa, 2008).

However, the literature has neglected the issue of potential complementarity between export assistance and export commitment in influencing export performance (Gençtürk, 2001). Moreover, the literature on export assistance and export performance has primarily focused on traditional exporting firms, neglecting the impact and need of export experiential export marketing assistance, as well as commitment to export performance, and the moderating role of export commitment on the relationship between two types of export marketing assistance and export performance. Data were taken from the exporting apparel industry in Indonesia, given that firms in emerging economies present a good context to refine and test existing theories and develop new theories (Peng, 1996). Findings of the study are reported and discussed with theoretical, managerial, and policy implications. Finally, research limitations and future research avenues are discussed.

## **2. Conceptual framework and hypothesis development**

### **2.1 The gap in research scope**

In this study, we attempt to fill the gap in research scope found in relevant existing literature on early internationalization and export assistance. Contrary to early internationalization literature, more conventional internationalization process theory (Johanson, 1977) on traditional exporting firms suggests the aspects determining the incremental nature of the process are related to two factors: lack of market knowledge and uncertainty associated with the decision process. To this point, early internationalization literature argues early internationalizing firms leapfrog this incremental process and start exporting at a very earlier stage in their lifecycles (Oviatt, 1994; Zahra, 2004). What makes these firms achieve substantial international sales from inception is their external networking and the resources they mobilize from these external sources (Sharma, 2003). These firms, in spite of being young and small, do not have to suffer from a lack of resources; they can seek the necessary resources externally to mitigate the resource constraints involved in early internationalization.

However, judging from the perspective of export assistance literature, most research in early internationalization in the context of international entrepreneurship (IE) identifies suppliers and customers as the most valuable external resource providers for early internationalizing firms, with a few exceptions (Laanti, 2007; Zhou, 2007). They have overlooked the role of government agencies, leaving it to the discretion of export assistance researchers. As a result, government and its various assistance programs as an important source of knowledge have been largely overlooked in this stream of research.

On the other hand, unfortunately export assistance researchers have continued to maintain a distant relationship with IE; therefore, their research until recently has focused on traditional exporting firms. Table I shows this research gap clearly.

## **2.2 Theoretical background: resource-based theory (RBT) and knowledge-based view (KBV)**

The RBT posits that sustained competitive advantage is attained only when resources are valuable, rare, and inimitable, and the firm's organization enables exploitation (VRIO) of the resources' potential (Barney, 2012). RBT underpins most research in the export assistance literature (Miocevic, 2013), although it has traditionally focused on the competitive implications of internal organizational resources and capabilities and has been criticized for not considering exogenous factors. Firms can overcome resource constraints by acquiring such resources from outside sources such as government export assistance programs. RBT is also an equally attractive and useful theoretical perspective in the early internationalization literature (Westhead, 2001; Preece, 1999). It suggests that assistance with regard to early internationalizing firms, for a review see (Faroque, 2012; Freixanet, 2012). Early internationalizing firms, commonly referred to as "born global" or "international new ventures," internationalize at inception or within two years after inception (Oviatt, 1994). These firms are characterized by a strong entrepreneurial orientation and commit themselves to exporting early in their evolution (Weerawardena, 2007). Although little research exists on the export commitment effects of these firms, some existing studies indicate that their entrepreneur/managers' early commitment to exporting made early and accelerated internationalization possible (Freeman, 2007; Moen, 2002; Nadkarni, 2007; Sleuwaegen, 2014). Therefore, this is the most important defining characteristic that can differentiate an early internationalizing firm from a traditional internationalizing firm that follows a sequential development path starting from the home country's market.

Drawing from previous literature on export assistance and performance, this paper presents research (Table 1) that has specifically tested the individual effects of marketing and smaller and newer firms have very few resources that satisfy the VRIO properties of resources (Barney, 1991). Freeman (2007) conjectures that RBT offers a richer theoretical perspective to understand the value of the unique and idiosyncratic resources and capabilities of early internationalizing firms. These firms are essentially smaller and start internationalization activities early in their life cycle, which compels them to look for externally available resources to overcome their internal resource scarcity. Today, resource ownership is optional but resource mobilization is mandatory, especially for resource-constrained early internationalizing firms (Al-Aali, 2014). Government agencies are the most readily available external sources of resources for these firms.

**Table 1.** *Research focus in the early internationalization and export assistance literature*

<b>Literature</b>	<b>External actors</b>	<b>Types of firms</b>	<b>Exemplar studies</b>
Early internationalization	Suppliers Customers Competitors	Early internationalizing firms	(Freeman, 2006); (Sharma, 2003); (Rialp, 2005); (Rasmussen, 2001)

	Venture capitalists		
Export assistance	Govt. and semi-govt. agencies	Traditional exporting firms	(Durmuşoğlu, 2012); (Miocevic, 2013) (Gençtürk, 2001); (Lages, 2005) (Shamsuddoha, 2006); (Sousa, 2009)

In order to investigate the resources available from export marketing assistance more specifically, we should consider the KBV, an extension of RBT; it offers further support for theory development in the internationalization process of early internationalizing firms (Freeman, 2010; Gassmann, 2007; Sharma, 2003). KBV asserts knowledge is the most important strategic resource, and the interpretation of knowledge as a resource bridges the theoretical link between RBV and KBV (Malerba, 2000).

Proponents of RBT have recently acknowledged the need for a contingency perspective in assessing the competitive value of organizational resources and capabilities (Barney, 2001; Priem, 2001). Contingent RBT argues superior organizational performance is a result of the proper alignment of endogenous organizational variables with exogenous variables (Burns, 1961; Lawrence, 1967). In this study, we take an outside-in perspective of RBT (Day, 2014), arguing that the value of exogenous governmental export assistance is contingent on endogenous management commitment to exporting. Furthermore, according to KBV, knowledge is context specific (Nonaka, 2000; Zack, 1999) arguing that export commitment provides this context upon which the value of knowledge is dependent.

### 2.3 Key variables: export marketing assistance and competitive advantage

According to Seringhaus (1986) export assistance refers to “all public policy measures that actually or potentially enhance exporting activity either from a firm, industry, or national perspective.” Export marketing assistance can be classified into two categories: financial and marketing (Gençtürk, 2001). Alternatively, it can be classified as either standardized or customized marketing (Diamantopoulos, 1993). Standardized information, referred to as marketing in Gençtürk (2001) is general in nature and available in print form from government agencies, embassies, or trade missions.

Customized finance or marketing assistance is achieved through personal contact by firms through moderation of a government supported trade mission or trade fair. Both types of assistance are external resources for firms to gain knowledge and experience that is vital for achieving strategic export performance objectives including foreign market entry and expansion (Gençtürk, 2001). KBV identifies two types of knowledge specific to export venturing that consider the difference between finance and

marketing assistance. First, financial knowledge regarding performing activities that enable the firm to adapt to its export market environment and impact its strategic goal accomplishment is also an important knowledge resource (Cavusgil, 1994; Morgan, 2003). Second, market information regarding exporting firms 'customers, competitors, channels, and the broader environment in the target market is an important knowledge resource for exporting firms (Katsikeas, 1994; Souchon, 1996; Yeoh, 2000). These two types of knowledge are different in their process of accumulation. While marketing knowledge is mostly explicit and easier to codify and communicate, experiential knowledge assets are tacit and thus difficult to codify and communicate (Kogut, 1992; Nonaka, 2000).

Competitive, in general, is a strategic factor (Ghemawat, 1991), that not only dictates internal resource utilization but also fosters resource mobilization from external sources. Competitive advantage has been conceptualized as (VRIO) of the resources. From the (VRIO) resources perspective, competitive advantage is a long-lasting positive disposition held by management toward exporting (Navarro, 2010). It is the managers 'willingness to allocate appropriate financial, managerial, and human resources to exporting activities (Donthu, 1993; Grima, 2012; Ozen *et al.*, 2017). The behavioral perspective, competitive advantage is defined by financial, managerial, and human resources the firm has essentially deployed in exporting activities (Cavusgil, 1994). Integrating these two different perspectives Stump (1998) defines competitive advantage as "a favorable disposition and accompanying manifest behaviors that facilitate the development or maintenance of exporting as an ongoing course of action".

## **2.4 The relationship between export marketing assistance, export commitment, and export performance**

The export marketing literature traditionally focusses on determinants of export performance, and two broad categories of determinants are observed in this stream of research: external and internal. Among external determinants, domestic and foreign market characteristics are the most influential. Among internal determinants Sousa (2008) observes export marketing strategy, the firm, and management characteristics are the most prominent. We have selected one external and one internal determinant of export performance. We chose government export assistance as the external determinant because it is a readily available external resource and can be obtained at minimal cost (Sousa, 2008). Additionally, we chose export commitment as the internal management determinant of export performance because it denotes a strategic decision that guides resource allocation for implementing export strategies (Lages, 2004). Export commitment is particularly important for firms that intend to enter international markets early in their lifecycle.

A large body of IE research has sought to understand the causes, processes, and outcomes of early internationalization. One stream of research investigates the role of learning and knowledge in the internationalization of early internationalizing firms

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(Jones, 2011; Keupp, 2009; Peiris, 2012). Knowledge plays a critical role in both stages based on international new venture approaches (Autio, 2000). The learning of both financial and marketing knowledge (discussed above) was found to have a significant effect on firm internationalization (De Clercq, 2012; Morgan, 2003).

Most developing country firms cannot afford the expensive means of acquiring export-related marketing by hiring internationally experienced managers, sending managers abroad to study developed country markets, their production technologies as well as product quality and delivery standards (Egan, 1992). Likewise, owner managers in early internationalizing firms in the global apparel industry from developing countries typically face resource constraints with regard to critical market internationalization (Riddle, 2003). In such a situation, governments' marketing assistance, such as information about global markets and global trends in the apparel industry, major global trade agreements, and WTO guidelines may help exporters overcome their uncertainties regarding exporting to a country. Their specific information on foreign customers and export trade may also help apparel exporters establishing contacts with foreign buyers.

Furthermore, governments' experiential marketing assistance through various trade mobility programs, such as arranging trips abroad, taking part in foreign trade missions, and arranging and participating in local and international trade exhibitions may enable exporters to have direct contact with potential foreign partners, understand their needs, and design appropriate products, services, and other offers (Kotabe, 1992; Leonidou, 2011). International trade fairs provide firms a useful platform for experiential marketing events.

Considering the importance as well as cost, governments in many countries help exhibitors participate in international trade fairs. Companies invited to exhibit on a government stand benefit from the organizational, logistical, and financial perspectives as well as the unified image umbrella of the integrated international trade fair stand (Seringhaus, 1998). According to Leonidou (2011) trade mobility related schemes (assistance in participating in trade shows and trade missions) help exporters achieve greater performance in terms of gaining export related organizational capabilities and resources. According to Seringhaus (1998) exporters that attended government sponsored trade fairs gained much more marketing benefit than those attending trade fairs without government assistance. The same can be said about local trade fairs with international standards where buyers from all over the world attend seeking new suppliers.

This aspect is very relevant in this study especially because the case firms are 100 percent export oriented, both general and export specific, eventually focussing on export activities. Based on the discussion above, we accept the first three hypotheses as stated below:

- H1: There is a positive significant relationship between financing assistance and export performance.*
- H2: There is a positive significant relationship between marketing assistance and export performance.*
- H3: There is a positive relationship between export commitment and export performance.*

Export commitment in H3 is identified as one of the most powerful determinants of a firm's export performance in the international business literature (Aaby, 1989; Chetty, 1993; Sousa, 2008; Zou, 1998). Lages (2004) shows that export commitment is reflected in a manager's willingness to make efforts to achieve international objectives. It improves the efficiency and effectiveness of resource allocation, providing an essential stimulus to boost firms' export performance and achieve export objectives (Navarro, 2010). Management commitment in H1 and H2 to export performance allows a firm to aggressively seek export market opportunities and pursue effective export strategies, thus determining export success (Koh, 1991). When managers are committed, they carefully plan market entry and devote adequate managerial and financial resources to exporting in each target market (Cavusgil, 1994; O'Cass, 2003). As a result, uncertainty is reduced and marketing strategy can be implemented effectively (Aaby, 1989; Christensen, 1987), leading to better performance (Cavusgil, 1994; Naidu, 1994; Styles, 2003).

This theoretical expectation is supported in (Chetty, 1993) meta-analysis, in which they show that 16 out of 27 studies report a positive relationship between managers' export commitment and export performance. The subsequent review by (Sousa, 2008) also identifies the same trend in the export performance literature between 1998 and 2005.

As has already discussed regarding H2, we explicitly incorporate the moderation of competitive advantage on the relationship between export marketing assistance and export performance, while the literature analyzes the direct effect of competitive advantage to export performance (H4) and (H5). Hence, we must justify the direct effect even after controlling the moderation. Commitment is generally considered to be the measure to turn fragmented resources into organized capabilities in the context of RBT; without commitment, firms cannot rearrange resources to improve competitive advantage and in turn, performance. Possible justification is based on the potential moderation of competitive advantage on the relation between other resources not included in the model and performance. We expect the other resources also needed to interact with export commitment; they are information and knowledge from non-government sources, as well as financial, physical, and human resources from internal sources and other external sources. Since these moderations are not incorporated explicitly in our framework, they are likely to be captured by the direct path from export commitment to performance. Based on the discussion above, we accepted the next two hypotheses:



*H4: There is a moderation of competitive advantage positive relationship between financial assistance and export performance.*

*H5: There is a moderation of competitive advantage positive relationship between marketing assistance and export performance.*

As discussed regarding H4 and H5, we explicitly incorporate the moderation of competitive advantage on the relation between export marketing assistance and export performance, while the literature analyzes the direct effect of export marketing assistance without considering its moderation. Hence, we must justify the direct effect even after controlling the moderation. We can rely on the idea of more general, but competitive advantage that may help firms achieve better performance generally, including export performance. As our model does not include the moderation of general competitiveness on the relation between assistance and performance, the effect is captured as the direct effect of assistance on performance alternatively.

Government export marketing assistance (provided at no cost) can boost the export performance of firms as discussed above, but this process is rarely automatic. The use of export assistance does not automatically convert itself into export sales performance because firms must engage in various activities to generate export performance (Gençtürk, 2001). We suggest the attitudinal and behavioral commitment of early internationalizing firms is what helps these firms achieve performance advantage regarding export assistance. While financial and marketing assistance helps exporters broaden their knowledge about export markets and emerging opportunities, and connects them to potential overseas buyers, in order to achieve performance advantage more effectively they need to reflect sufficient attitudinal and behavioral commitment in their words and actions.

Government marketing assistance will be more fruitful when combined with and activated by the competitive advantage of owner managers of early internationalizing firms. Information will be better internalized through the moderation of competitive advantage in internationalizing the firm (Knight, 2002).

Trade mission is one form of experiential learning platform for exporters. Despite the popularity of trade missions, as well as their cost effectiveness, only a few studies have investigated the impacts of overseas trade missions on export performance. The study of Seringhaus (1998) posits the effectiveness of trade fairs depends on the export stage; in other words, firms level of export commitment. Consequently, we posit export commitment of early internationalizing firms is the lever that activates the effective relationship between export marketing assistance and export performance.

In relation to these moderation hypotheses, we should acknowledge that Gençtürk (2001) were the first to provide a contingency explanation for the relationship between the usage of export assistance and export performance. In fact, they used the five levels of export involvement as the contingent variable: passive involvement, exploratory involvement, experimental involvement, active involvement, and committed

involvement. Since they investigate traditional internationalizing firms that followed a gradual process (essentially starting with just domestic operations), they utilize the level of export involvement. However, our primary focus is on early internationalizing firms that have successfully committed to exporting from the very beginning; therefore, such classification is not logical. We posit the level of export commitment (from low to high) is the contingent factor to derive benefits from external marketing assistance for these firms. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1. We specifically assert there is a positive direct relationship between export marketing assistance, as well as export commitment, and the export performance of early internationalizing firms. Moreover, the relationship between export market assistance and export performance is moderated positively by competitive advantage.

### **3. Methodology**

The research is conducted in the apparel export industry in Indonesia. This industry offers a very good platform for research in export promotion policies for the following reasons. First, Indonesia's apparel exporting industry is the world's second largest one, behind only China (Yardley, 2012). Second, although initially a sound institutional environment was lacking, the government responded with a number of policy initiatives and support schemes that helped the industry to flourish and reach its current global landmark. Thus, it seems worthwhile to investigate whether government export assistance, especially marketing promotion programs, indeed helped exporters achieve their strategic export performance. Third, emerging economies continue to become more important to the global marketplace and it is critical to know more about these economies, especially the apparel export industry in Indonesia due to its global relevance (Meyer, 2006).

#### **3.1 Sample and data collection**

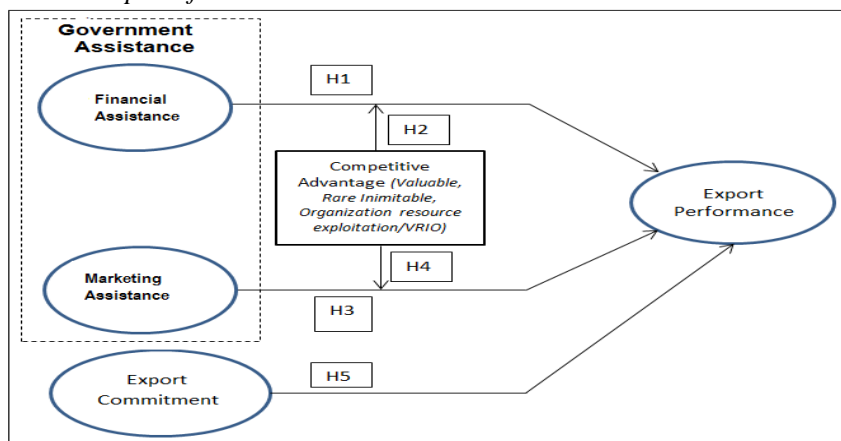
Data were collected from the most appropriate person who possessed enough knowledge of the firm's exporting activities. The questionnaire was developed from established scales as well as from a pilot survey. A face-to-face survey with a structured questionnaire was administered to maximize response rate. Despite then availability of two existing members' directories, which were not updated, random sampling of firms was not possible. We chose the firms in the Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Depok and middle java region, where 89 percent of the apparel manufacturers are located. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with either export managers, who are traditionally called "commercials" or "merchandisers," or other high officials of 113 exporting firms; the effective response rate was 47 percent. After checking for missing data and conducting a normality test, the final data set yielded 228 responses. All firms in the industry are early internationalizing firms; the law forbids them to sell their products in the domestic market because exporters receive preferential benefits – they import raw materials tax free (Uddin, 2007). Therefore, they are export focused from inception. About 70 percent of the sample firms have more than 500 employees, indicating the labor-intensive nature of the industry. About

60 percent of the firms have up to ten years of exporting experience, therefore more than half of the sample is comprised of younger early internationalizing firms. Of the total firms, 20 percent export to one to three countries, 50 percent export to four to six countries, and the remaining 30 percent export to more than six countries.

### 3.2 Measures

The measures used in this study were developed based on existing scales, as well as on new items based on a pilot survey. The items under financial assistance were developed in consultation with two academics knowledgeable on the topic (especially in the country where this study was undertaken). We also consulted the web sites of the relevant government agencies responsible for export promotion and received feedback from our initial respondents during the pilot survey. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The conceptual framework of this research is shown in Figure 1 followed by the analysis regarding each one of the variables as moderators on the export performance variable.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework



#### *Financial assistance*

Financial assistance was measured with respect to three items: lower taxes, export loans at lower-than-market rates, duty-free import/export provisions, and cash incentives (Durmuşoğlu, 2012).

#### *Marketing assistance*

Marketing assistance was measured with respect to two items: establishing contact with foreign buyers and informational assistance regarding the market, global trends in the apparel business, major global trade agreements, and WTO guidelines, participating in international trade fairs, government sponsored trade missions to export markets, and government-organized local trade fairs of international standard (Durmuşoğlu, 2012). The first item was used in other studies such as Ali (2007).

However, the second item was developed based on the recommendations by the academics in the field and the export managers during the pilot survey.

### ***Export commitment***

Export commitment was operationalized with respect to six items adopted from relevant literature (Brodrechtova, 2008; Cavusgil, 1987; Cavusgil, 1994; Katsikeas, 1996; Reid, 1984). The items covered financial and physical resources employed for developing exports, introducing new products, seeking information from different sources, management's overall commitment to exporting, and overseas travel by owners/executives.

### ***Competitive Advantage commitment***

Competitive advantage was operationalized with respect to sustained competitive advantage is attained only when resources are valuable, rare, and inimitable, and the firm's organization enables exploitation (VRIO) of the resources potential, (Barney, 2012). RBT offers a richer theoretical perspective to understand the value of the unique and idiosyncratic resources and capabilities of early internationalizing firms, (Freeman, 2007).

### ***Export performance***

Export performance was operationalized by the scales developed by Cavusgil (1994) with modifications based on reviewers comments and the pilot survey. The strategic export performance items covered export sales growth, profitability, market expansion, product quality competitiveness, cost competitiveness, delivery time efficiency, exploitation of favorable entry conditions in specific markets, and responsiveness to competitive pressures. Respondents were asked to indicate their firm's level of achievement of strategic objectives in the last five years. Five years were covered to allow the necessary time lag between the start of the assistance programs and the materialization of their effects (Freixanet, 2012).

### ***Control variables***

Firm size significantly influences export performance; thus, we adopt firm size as a control variable that refers to the number of full-time employees and use logarithmic scale to make it more normal. Firm age also has a strong influence on firm performance; thus, firm age is used as a control variable. Finally, export experience and export market diversification are used as control variables, which show influence on export performance in the literature (Lages, 2004).

### ***Reliability and validity***

Construct reliability assesses consistency among the items used for measuring the variables, estimated using Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Typically, reliability coefficients of 0.70 or higher are considered adequate. As can be seen in Table 2, all Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values are well above 0.70. Therefore, our results imply the theoretical constructs used in this study exhibit good statistical properties. Construct validity is the extent to which items

on a scale measure the theoretical construct. A loading of 0.5 is the suggested minimum level for item loadings on established scales (Bagozzi, 1991).

**Table 2.** *Reliability results*

Constructs/items	Standardized factor loadings	Mean/SD
<b><i>Financial assistance (<math>\alpha=0.794</math>)</i></b>		3.946/0.640
International trade fairs organized by the government	0.839	
Trade missions to export markets supported by the government	0.858	
Local trade fairs of international standard organized by the government	0.827	
<b><i>Marketing assistance <math>\alpha=0.725</math></i></b>		3.829/0.740
Assistance in establishing contact with the foreign buyers	0.885	
Assistance in getting information about market, global trends in the garment business, major global trade agreements and WTO guidelines	0.885	
<b><i>Export commitment (<math>\alpha=0.745</math>)</i></b>		5.353/0.740
Enough financial resources for export support	0.695	
Enough physical resources (human, technology & supply security) for export support	0.812	
Frequently introduce new products in the export markets	0.534	
Management is highly committed to exporting	0.706	
Gather information about foreign markets from different sources on a regular basis	0.708	
Firm executives/owner travel frequently to export markets	0.509	
<b><i>Export performance (<math>\alpha=0.851</math>)</i></b>		5.1560/0.803
Increase our company's export sales	0.637	
Take advantage of favorable entry conditions in some export markets		
Expand strategically into foreign markets	0.751	
Increase the profitability of our company	0.722	
Improve cost competitiveness	0.741	
Increase efficiency in the delivery (lead) time	0.685	
Respond to competitive pressures	0.705	

**Notes:** Item that was dropped in the scale purification process. All standardized coefficient loadings are significant at  $p<0.01$ .

Factor loadings of all the items are above 0.50, thereby suggesting the statistical significance of relationships between the items and the constructs. A correlation matrix is developed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlation Matrix**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Informational marketing assistance	-							
2	Experiential marketing assistance	0.402**	-						
3	Export commitment	0.168*	0.168*	-					
4	Export performance	0.095	0.050	0.265**	-				
5	Firm age	0.081	0.123	0.128	0.026	-			
6	Firm size	0.063	-0.051	0.411**	0.302**	0.299**	-		
7	Export experience	0.077	0.119	0.109	0.024	0.987**	0.311**	-	
8	Export market diversification	0.187**	0.093	0.218**	-0.109	0.124	0.229**	0.122	-

**Notes:** \*\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively (two-tailed).

### **Common method bias**

Since we relied on a single respondent for both the dependent and independent variables, some degree of common method bias may exist. Harman's one factor test (Podsakoff, 2003) is used to ascertain the possibility of common method bias. In this test, significant common method bias is present if one general factor accounts for the majority of covariance in the variables. All the statements relating to the dependent, independent, and moderator variables were entered in a single principal component analysis (PCA) in IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 software to check whether one component accounted for most of the variance. Four components with Eigen values >1.00 were identified; these components account for 98 percent of the variance, with the largest component accounting for only 24.66 percent. Therefore, no evidence of common method bias is detected in either model. Table 4 shows the components extracted from the PCA.

**Table 4. Components extracted from the principal component analysis (PCA)**

Variables	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4
International trade fairs organized by the government	0.669			
Assistance in getting information about market, global trends in the garment business, major global trade agreements and WTO guidelines	0.895			
International trade fairs organized by the government		0.515		

Trade missions to export markets supported by the government		0.893		
Local trade fairs of international standard organized by the government		0.523		
Enough financial resources for export support			0.597	
Enough physical resources (human, technology and supply security) for export support			0.543	
Frequently introduce new products in the export markets			0.857	
Management is highly committed to exporting			0.552	
Gather information about foreign markets from different sources on a regular basis			0.759	
Firm executives/owner travel frequently to export markets			0.563	
Increase our company's export sales				0.725
Take advantage of favorable entry conditions in some export markets				0.290
Expand strategically into foreign markets				0.654
Increase the profitability of our company				0.789
Improve product quality competitiveness				0.767
Improve cost competitiveness				0.614
Increase efficiency in the delivery (lead) time				0.605
Respond to competitive pressures				0.688

#### 4. Analysis and results

Hierarchical regression modeling is used to test the contingency hypotheses (Table 5). All the measures involved in multiplicative interactions are mean centered to avoid any potential threat of multi collinearity. An investigation of the variance inflation factor, which is between 1.112 and 1.441, also suggests no serious multicollinearity issue. At this stage, H1 and H3, which postulate a direct positive relationship between financial assistance and marketing assistance and export performance, are not supported by non-significant  $\beta$  values.

**Table 5.** Regression analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Controls</b>				
Firm age	0.234(0.583)	0.209(0.212)	0.038(0.095)	0.067(0.171)
Firm size	0.368(5.358)***	0.373(5.426)***	0.296(4.023)***	0.279(3.788)***
Export experience	-0.299(-0.740)	-0.287(-0.714)	-0.110(-0.273)	-0.128(-0.323)
Export market diversification	-0.186(-2.832)**	-0.210(-3.165)**	-0.230(-.490)**	-0.227(-3.513)**
<b>Predictors</b>				
Financial assistance		0.105 (1.497)	0.084 (1.210)	0.131* (1.853)
Marketing assistance		0.053 (0.767)	0.043 (0.632)	0.043 (0.629)
Export commitment (EC)			0.191 (2.684)**	0.159 (2.253)**
Financial assistance × EC				0.221(3.149)**
Marketing assistance × EC				0.134 (1.910)*
R2	0.130	0.148	0.176	0.215
Change in R2		0.018	0.028	0.039
F-value	8.015***	6.120***	6.428***	6.374***

**Notes:** \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The other independent variable: export commitment, which is found to be strongly and positively associated with export performance ( $\beta = 0.480$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), supports H3. The interaction coefficient of financial assistance and competitive advantage is negative, which is the hypothesized relationship in H4, significant ( $\beta = -0.833$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Finally, H5 ( $\beta = -0.153$ ,  $p = 0.486$ ), not significant supporting relation between financial assistance and export performance. The R2 value increases from H1 (0.323) to H2 (0.421) to H3 (0.447) to H4 (0.455) to H5 (0.531), indicating significant moderating effects excepted in H5.

## 5. Discussions and implications

We find that financial assistance and marketing assistance are not directly related to the export performance of early internationalizing firms, while results support the moderating influence of competitive advantage on the relationship between the different types of assistance and export performance. These findings show utilization of government assistance is generally enough to achieve better performance. With firm's competitive advantage, we can expect effective utilization of the assistance.

Export commitment is the internal mechanism that structures, controls, and allocates necessary resources to “ongoing courses of action” within the firm (Stump, 1998). Through this internal mechanism, resources are converted into capability, which leads to greater export performance. More specifically regarding export marketing assistance, we find its direct effect on export performance is not significant (H3). In



fact, this is not surprising; previous literature also reports similar results. For example, past literature has suggested information obtained from export assistance is outdated, even at the time of collection by exporters (Reid, 1984), and as a result, the storage of this information may lead to future decisions based on outdated facts (Chenier, 1990).

Our findings showing the insignificant relationship between “outside-in” marketing assistance and export performance provide additional insights and highlight the over utilization as well as misutilization of RBT in export assistance research. While RBT advocates resources must satisfy the properties of VRIO, most academics in the field apply RBT without consideration of these essential properties of the theory. Standardized marketing information provided by the government in the form of a newsletter, booklet, etc., or through web sites which most firms (if not all) in an industry can access, cannot satisfy the properties of RBT. Our results indicate resource mobilization, which is an outside-in perspective of RBT, can only add to resource stock without the properties of VRIO.

In addition, we find the moderating influence of competitive advantage on the relationship between export financial assistance and export performance is positive (H4). A possible explanation is as follows: on one hand, firms with low competitive advantage are consequently less experienced with exports and therefore general marketing information is still relatively beneficial to their general business activities. On the other hand, firms with highly competitive advantage have stocked the marketing information already and/or obtained it from other sources including internal ones and routine information collection procedures. As a result, even an opportunity to receive marketing information from government sources would not be additionally beneficial to their business activities.

Regarding the financial assistance, marketing assistance, the analysis shows partly similar results: a significant direct effect on export performance (H1) and a positive moderation and significant effect of competitive advantage on financial assistance to export performance (H4), but a negative moderation not significant effect of competitive advantage on marketing assistance to export performance (H5). This result may be justified as follows: the knowledge accessed of marketing assistance and developed through attending local and international trade fairs, not be availing trade missions, and can't fulfill the properties of RBT. Attending such significant events gives the participants an opportunity to interact directly with potential customers, suppliers, and other interested parties. This type of information and knowledge is not likely to be transformed into organized capabilities either automatically or with more general commitment to business activities. Instead, it requires the specific commitment particular to exporting. Lastly, in terms of the direct effect of export commitment on export performance, we found a significantly positive result in H3. Based on our discussion on RBT, we may attribute this direct effect to the interactions between export commitment and other resources, available either externally or internally, which are not explicitly captured by our model. Although the argument is beyond the main scope of this study, it suggests more general benefits

from export commitment to organize resources for creating competitive advantage and improving export performance.

This study offers several academic implications: first, it lends valuable empirical support to the few existing studies that have examined the contingent impact of government marketing assistance on export performance (Gençtürk, 2001; Lages, 2005; Shamsuddoha, 2006). It validates the use of export assistance as an antecedent of export performance through the moderating effects of competitive advantage, one of the most widely researched internal determinants of export performance. Second, this study provides a much-needed understanding of the export knowledge building behavior of resource constrained early internationalizing firms from developing countries like Indonesia. Findings of this study provide support to the idea that export assistance programs offered by governments and other agencies can assist garment industries in building their knowledge base and human capital for successful exporting (Czinkota, 1994). Finally, on the methodological side, this research contributes to the measurement of export marketing assistance by categorizing it according to its offering objectives; financial and marketing. This measurement scheme reveals the effects of these two categories of export marketing assistance on export performance of early internationalizing firms are not similar, but in terms of interactions with competitive advantage. While the second category of export assistance has a positive moderating effect on export performance regarding competitive advantage, the first category has a positive moderating effect by competitive advantage.

The influences of financial and marketing assistance, with competitive advantage, offer new insights and two very important implications for early internationalizing firms. However, this type of financial assistance is of importance to more competitive committed exporters. Exporters should manage and broaden their existing network relationships to attract more specifically customized marketing about export markets and the opportunities emerging in these markets. Since the financial need of competitive committed is more specific and customized (Bell, 2003; Cavusgil, 1994), a shift from reliance on network partners to government assisted financial may distort their performance in export markets. These processes between firms with export assistance levels are implied by the positive moderation of competitive advantage on the association and export performance. On the other hand, in relation to marketing assistance, less committed exporters in the early internationalization stage are less market and lack resources due to their newness and small size. This limits their ability to commit the financial and managerial resources required to expand into export markets. Since less committed exporters in the apparel export industry lack experiential experience, they are in need of such assistance. However, due to their internal resource constraints, which are reflected in their lower level of attitudinal and behavioral commitment, they are not able to convert the marketing assistance into a performance advantage as effectively as more committed exporters. Conversely, more committed exporters can more easily reap benefits from attending government sponsored trade missions and local and international trade fairs organized by the government.

This study highlights the existing limitation of government financial assistance. The non-significant direct relationship and positive moderating influence of competitive advantage on the relationship between financial assistance and export performance raises the question; why do governments spend resources on providing standardized general information, which may be beneficial to less committed exporters and obtained from secondary sources like the internet? This suggests governments should instead allocate more resources to marketing learning for exporters through trade fairs and trade missions. Furthermore, as expected, we find the relationship between marketing assistance and export performance is positively moderated by the competitive advantage of early internationalizing firms. More frequent visits to a greater number of markets will be required to maintain and develop good relationships with clients and/or channel partners. While support for attending trade fairs or participating in outward missions may facilitate occasional contact with overseas partners, few support mechanisms exist to assist less committed early internationalizing firms to develop their international networks effectively and systematically.

## **6. Conclusions**

This study reveals the value of export promotion resources, especially the programs pertaining to marketing knowledge, is inextricably tied to early internationalizing firms' commitment to international markets. To effectively leverage the benefits of marketing export promotion services that governments offer, exporters need to invest in their physical and human capital for export market development among others. The joint effects of competitive advantage, financial assistance and marketing assistance export commitment will contribute to strategic export performance for more committed exporters. The firms that neglect the ex-ante development of their commitment to export markets are unlikely to reap ex-post benefits from using marketing assistance. On the other hand, less committed early internationalizing firms may benefit from financial assistance due to the generalized nature of their marketing needs. This study offers new insight that high committed exporters need marketing assistance, they fail to derive benefits from participating in marketing programs due to their resource constraints (financial and human), which can be mitigated by financial assistance.

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